

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PHNOM 05003 230750 Z

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1369

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 5003

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, MASS, CBMR

SUBJ: CRITICAL ASPECTS OF U. S. AIR OPERATIONS IN CAMBODIA

SECSTATE PLS PASS PRIORITY TO SECDEF, CINCPAC, COMUSSAG/7 AF,
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK, AMEMBASSY PARIS, AMEMBASSY SAIGON,

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

PARIS FOR KISSINGER

1. WHILE YOU ARE NO LESS AWARE THAN WE OF THE CRITICALITY
OF U. S. MILITARY AIR OPERATIONS TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE
GKR IN THE ABSENCE OF A CEASEFIRE, THERE ARE SEVERAL
ASPECTS OF THAT CRITICALITY WHICH WE WISH TO ADDRESS
IN THIS MESSAGE, HAVING IN MIND THAT OVER THE NEXT DAYS
AND WEEKS IT MAY PROVE EXPEDIENT OR DESIRABLE TO DRAW
DISTINCTIONS AMONG VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF OPERATIONS.

2. THAT TACAIR OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS HAS PROVIDED
THE NECESSARY MARGIN FOR SURVIVAL NEEDS NO LENGTHY
ELABORATION. WITHIN THE LAST THREE MONTHS, TO TAKE THE
MOST RECENT EXAMPLES, KOMPONG THOM AND TAKEO WOULD HAVE
FALLEN AND THE MEKONG WOULD HAVE BEEN CONCLUSIVELY
INTERDICTED WITHOUT TACAIR. WE THINK IT POSSIBLE THAT
THE PRESENT DAILY LEVEL OF T-28 SORTIES FLOWN BY KAF
COULD BE DOUBLED TO SAY 30 WITH ASSETS ON HAND IF PILOT
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PAGE 02 PHNOM 05003 230750 Z

TRAINING WERE DRASTICALLY CURTAILED, BUT THE KAF HAS NEITHER THE FIREPOWER NOR THE PROFICIENCY TO COPE ALONE WITH THE TYPE OF EMERGENCY COMBAT SITUATION THE FANK HAS REPEATEDLY HAD TO FACE.

3. THE MEKONG CONVOY, VITAL TO THE SUPPLY OF THE PHNOM PENH AREA WITH PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, MUNITIONS, IMPORTED RICE, AND RAW MATERIALS FOR INDUSTRY, IS PARTICULARLY ILLUSTRATIVE OF FANK AND KAF INADEQUACIES. WITHOUT STRIPPING OTHER FRONTS, FANK IS PRESENTLY UNABLE TO PROVIDE THE FORCES NECESSARY FIRMLY TO SECURE BOTH BANKS OF THE MEKONG ALONG THEIR FULL LENGTH FROM PHNOM PENH TO THE SVN FRONTIER. FOR ITS PART, THE KAF NOW HAS 11 AU 24' S IN OPERATION AND WILL HAVE 6 HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS OPERATIONAL IN TWO WEEKS. THEY CAN PROVIDE SOME BUT INSUFFICIENT PROTECTION FOR THE CONVOYS AGAINST A VERY DETERMINED ENEMY. THIS INADEQUACY WOULD BE READILY APPARENT TO SHIP OWNERS, MASTERS, CREWS, AND KHMER PILOTS, AND IN OUR JUDGMENT, THEY MAY WELL REFUSE TO SAIL IF U. S. TACAIR IS WITHDRAWN. WITHOUT REGULAR MEKONG CONVOYS OR A VAST EMERGENCY AIRLIFT, PHNOM PENH WITH ITS POPULATION OF 1.3 MILLION WOULD NOT LONG REMAIN A VIABLE URBAN CENTER. IT WOULD SOON HAVE NO ELECTRICITY, NO INDUSTRY, AND RAPIDLY DWINDLING STOCKS OF SUCH NECESSITIES AS RICE (THERE IS A 38- DAY SUPPLY ON HAND AT THE MOMENT). UNEMPLOYMENT, HUNGER, AND CIVIL DISORDERS WOULD FOLLOW QUICKLY IN ABOUT THAT SEQUENCE. THE RAPID DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION IN PHNOM PENH WOULD IN FACT BE THE MOST SERIOUS IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCE OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF TACAIR SUPPORT.

4. U. S. MILIARY AIR TRANSPORT FILLS ALMOST AS VITAL A NEED AS TACAIR. RICE AND MUNITIONS ARE AIR- DROPPED REGULARLY BY C-130' S TO THE ISOLATED AND REFUGEE- SWOLLEN COMMUNITIES OF TAKEO (30,000 PERSONS), SVAY RIENG (60,000), AND KOMPONG THOM (7,000). KAF C-47' S CAN LAND AT THE LATTER TWO TOWNS, BUT THE TRANSPORT FLEET

IS INADEQUATE TO MEET THESE AS WELL AS THE MANY OTHER PRESSING IN- COUNTRY REQUIREMENTS. (THE 5 C-123' S THUS FAR DELIVERED WILL NOT BECOME OPERATIONAL UNTIL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PHNOM 05003 230750 Z

MID- AUGUST WHEN THE FIRST EIGHT CREWS BECOME AVAILABLE.) C-130' S ALSO DELIVER HIGH VALUE MUNITIONS AND OTHER MAP EQUIPMENT AND MATERIAL TO POCHENTONG, SUPPLEMENTING MEKONG CONVOY AND HIGHWAY FOUR DELIVERIES OF THESE ITEMS. IN THE PERIOD JANUARY- APRIL 1973 THERE WERE AN AVERAGE OF 175 C-130 AIRLANDED SORTIES AND 65.5 C-130 AIR- DROP SORTIES MONTHLY IN CAMBODIA.

5. YOU WILL NOTE THAT QUITE APART FROM THE MILITARY BENEFITS THE GKR DERIVES FROM OUR AIR OPERATIONS THE LATTER ARE EQUALLY CRITICAL TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE POPULATION IN THE CAPITAL AREA AND IN THE LOCALITIES CITED IN PARA 4. OUR AIR SUPPORT THUS SERVES A SIGNIFICANT HUMANITARIAN PURPOSE INDEPENDENT OF ITS OTHER USES; ITS WITHDRAWAL WOULD ENTAIL FURTHER AND EVEN MORE WIDESPREAD SUFFERING.

6. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON THE GKR OF A TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF OUR AIR SUPPORT WOULD BE IMMEDIATE AND DISASTROUS UNLESS THERE WERE SIMULTANEOUSLY A CEASEFIRE. THE NEAR-TERM IMPLICATIONS FOR THE VIABILITY OF THE CAPITAL (PARA 3) WOULD BE QUICKLY PERCEIVED, AND GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC MORALE WOULD DETERIORATE RAPIDLY. WE BELIEVE THAT FANK OFFICERS AND MEN, SENSING THE HOPELESS SITUATION OF THE CAPITAL, COULD NOT BE COUNTED UPON TO DEFEND IT. ON THE OTHER HAND, A REDUCTION IN THE LEVEL OF OUR AIR SUPPORT, AS OPPOSED TO ITS WITHDRAWAL, WOULD CREATE FEWER PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS, PARTICULARLY IF SUPPORT FOR THE MEKONG CONVOYS, FOR OTHER DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS ALONG VITAL LOC' S, AND FOR ISLOATED PROVINCIAL CENTERS WERE STILL AVAILABLE. INDEED, CONTINUATION OF AT LEAST THAT DEGREE OF AIR SUPPORT SEEMS TO US ESSENTIAL. OTHERWISE, THE SITUATION WOULD RAPIDLY BECOME UNTENABLE AND THIS MSSION WOULD FIND ITSELF UNABLE TO FUNCTION AND FACE TO FACEWITH ITS OWN EVACUATION IN THE RESULTING EMERGENCY.

7. WE HAVE NOT EXAMINED IN THIS MESSAGE THE FEASIBILITY OF SUBSTITUTING SOUTH VIETNAMESE FOR U. S. AIR SUPPORT OR THE IMPACT OF DEPLOYING ARVN GROUND FORCES AT KEY POINTS IN CAMBODIA, SUCH AS THE MEKONG, TO ASSIST THE FANK SINCE THESE ISSUES RAISE QUESTIONS WE ARE NOT FULLY
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 PHNOM 05003 230750 Z

QUALIFIED TO ANSWER. OUR JUDGMENT HERE IS THAT SOME U. S. AIR SUPPORT WOULD STILL BE INDISPENSABLE EVEN AFTER ARVN INTERVENTION. SIMILARY, WE HAVE NOT ADDRESSED THE QUESTION OF INTERDICTION OPERATIONS IN THE FREEDOM DEAL AREA SINCE THEY ARE LESS IMMEDIATELY RELATED TO GKR SURVIVAL.
SWANK

NOTE BY OC/ T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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